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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

27 March 1985

The Iranian Missile Threat

Summary

Iran claims to have fired seven long-range missiles at Iraqi cities since 12 March, and high-ranking Iranian leaders have threatened to launch more rockets in retaliation for Iraqi attacks on Iranian cities or tankers carrying Iranian oil. Libya apparently has sent six SCUD missiles and two launchers to Iran since last November and later probably sent the personnel to fire the missiles. We believe that two Iranian 747 transport flights from Tripoli last week may have carried as many as twenty more missiles to Iran. [redacted]

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As long as its supplies last, Iran will continue to fire missiles at Iraqi cities in retaliation for Iraqi attacks and to try to undermine civilian support for the regime in Baghdad. Libyan leader Qadhafi probably will continue to provide operational support for equipment in Iran but additional assistance is unlikely. Moscow probably is displeased by Qadhafi's actions and may threaten to stop deliveries of military equipment or spare parts if he sends more material to Iran. Qadhafi would not want to lose Soviet military support which he sees as necessary to counter possible US military threats. [redacted]

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Persian Gulf Division and [redacted] Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, [redacted]

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Iraq is not likely to reduce its attacks on Iranian cities because of the missile attacks and is calling on Tripoli and Moscow to stop further shipment from Libya to Iran. Baghdad also may ask the Soviets for more sophisticated weapons--such as the long-range SS-12 missile--it could use against Iran. Iraq will continue attacks on Iranian cities, probably will launch air strikes in an effort to destroy the SCUD launchers, and may try to shoot down aircraft transporting additional missiles to Iran. [redacted]

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Iran's new missile capability significantly increases its ability to threaten oil facilities in the Arab Gulf states. Although Iran would not have enough missiles to destroy such facilities, it could use the threat of an attack to pressure Gulf governments, especially in response to increasing Iraqi attacks on Gulf shipping. To avoid a confrontation with the US, Iran would not deliberately launch missiles against US facilities, although Tehran probably would launch such attacks in retaliation for US air or naval attacks on Iran. [redacted]

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Iran claims to have launched its first surface-to-surface missile on Iraq on 12 March, hitting the city of Kirkuk. Since then Tehran has launched six more missiles that hit Baghdad. [redacted]

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[redacted] Information from the North American Air Defense Command confirms that missiles launched from near the Iranian city of Kermanshah hit Baghdad on 16 and 25 March. Reports from [redacted] the US Embassy in Baghdad suggest that the seven attacks probably have caused around 100 casualties. [redacted]

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The missile attacks are in retaliation for Iraqi raids on Iranian cities and Baghdad's disregard of the UN's call for an end to attacks on civilian targets, according to Iranian officials. Tehran has also warned that Iran will launch more missiles if the Iraqis continue to use chemical weapons, attack ships in the Persian Gulf, or shoot down civilian aircraft over Iran. [redacted]

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[redacted] Iran wants the attacks on cities to stop so that Iran can concentrate on fighting the ground war. Tehran also probably is eager to stop the attacks on its cities to prevent the worsening of Iranian civilian morale. [redacted]

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The Libyan Connection

[redacted] Libya has supplied Iran with the surface-to-surface missiles used to attack Iraq. We estimate that Tripoli so far has sent Tehran two mobile SCUD launcher vehicles, associated equipment, and a small number of missiles. Our estimate of two SCUD launchers in Iran is [redacted]

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based on the size of the Libyan military contingent recently sent to Iran. So far, however, the Iranians have fired only one missile in each attack. [redacted]

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[redacted]

Libya is capable of providing Tehran with two SCUD launchers, additional missiles, and the personnel to operate the system. Tripoli has six operational SCUD brigades deployed in Libya, each equipped with nine launchers; at least 18 launchers remain in storage. Libya has at least six missiles allotted for each launcher in operational units, or an estimated total of over 300 missiles. We estimate that Libya could supply Iran with 30 missiles without significantly reducing Libyan military capabilities. [redacted]

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We believe that Libyan personnel are servicing the missile equipment and probably fired the missiles from Iran. [redacted] 18 to 24 months of training are required to operate and maintain SCUD equipment.

[redacted] We estimate, however, that they would not have had time to acquire the skill to operate the SCUD system without assistance from the Libyans. [redacted]

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Iraqi Reaction

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[redacted]

Iranian missile attacks so far have not deterred the Iraqis from continuing air strikes on major Iranian cities or attacking shipping in the Persian Gulf. On 19 March Baghdad declared an exclusionary zone over Iranian airspace and warned that civilian aircraft flying over Iran might be shot down. Iraqi officials also have tried to increase pressure on Iran by warning the citizens of Ahvaz to leave the city, suggesting that Iraq plans to launch attacks on the area. Baghdad probably would not agree to end the attacks on Iranian cities despite the Iranian missile attacks unless such a ceasefire was linked to an overall settlement of the war. [redacted]

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Future Iranian Attacks

If Iran has received additional missiles from Libya, it probably will use them to seek revenge and try to deter further Iraqi attacks. Long-range, surface-to-surface missiles offer Tehran the means to strike the enemy capital without risking Iran's few remaining operational fighter aircraft. Tehran also probably hopes that such attacks will help undermine Iraqi morale and public support for the Saddam Husayn regime. Reports from US diplomats in Baghdad, however, say that Iraqi morale is high because of the recent victory over Iran in the marshes northwest of Al Basrah. [redacted]

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We believe the Iranians will use their limited supply of missiles to attack large area targets such as cities to gain maximum publicity from their efforts. The SCUD's poor accuracy--around one kilometer at two-thirds of its maximum range--suggests that Iran probably could not target specific buildings with reasonable hope of hitting them with a single missile. Although a chance hit on an Iraqi military base would be costly, Iranian missile attacks do not threaten to reduce Iraq's overall military superiority over Iran. If Iran acquired a large number of missiles, however, it might consider launching a number of rockets at a facility, such as a chemical weapons plant, in hopes that one missile would find the target. [redacted]

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Tehran is likely to make strong efforts to acquire even more missiles and launchers, especially from Libya. We expect the Soviets--as they did last December--to warn Qadhafi about the need to gain Moscow's approval before transferring military equipment to third countries. Qadhafi is likely to continue to provide maintenance assistance for the equipment already in Iranian hands. Libya is less likely to provide more SCUD launchers and associated equipment. Qadhafi might anticipate that Tehran could use additional equipment to attack Arab Gulf states and he would not want to be blamed for disrupting the international oil market--an almost certain invitation in Qadhafi's mind for US military retaliation against Libya. [redacted]

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[redacted]

Other factors may influence Qadhafi's decision about providing further missiles beyond those already sent to Iran. Moscow almost certainly is

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displeased by Qadhafi's actions and may threaten to stop deliveries of military equipment or spare parts to Libya if he sends additional materiel to Iran. Qadhafi feels vulnerable to US military pressure and sees his close relations with Moscow as a restraint on Washington's willingness to attack him. He will not want to do anything that would suggest to the US that there are strains in the Libyan-Soviet relationship. [REDACTED]

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Prospects for Iraq

The Iraqis are likely to take strong military measures to prevent Iran from launching more missiles or to punish Tehran for future attacks. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] They may attempt to shoot down transport aircraft carrying additional missiles, support equipment, or personnel to Iran. Iraq also probably would increase its own missile and air strikes against Iranian cities--particularly Tehran--in retaliation for additional Iranian attacks. [REDACTED]

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Baghdad will keep pressuring Libya and the Soviet Union to prevent the transfer of more weapons to Iran. Iraq's ability to influence Libya is limited, although the Iraqis might threaten to increase support for Libyan dissidents if Tripoli sent more missiles to Iran. Baghdad is likely to ask Moscow for further safeguards and assurances that Libya will not be permitted to transfer weapons to other countries. The Iraqis probably will put additional pressure on the Soviets for more sophisticated weapons--such as the SU-24 fighter-bomber or SS-12 missiles with a 925 kilometer range--which Iraq can use to retaliate against Iran. [REDACTED]

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Implications for the US

Iran's new surface-to-surface missile capability significantly increases Tehran's capability to threaten US allies in the Persian Gulf. The SCUD's 300 kilometer range gives it the capability to reach major oil-producing or exporting facilities along the Gulf in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman. Iranian Revolutionary Guard crews will eventually learn how to launch the missiles and Tehran might be tempted to attack such targets in response to increasing Iraqi attacks against Iranian oil export operations. Although Iran probably would not have a sufficient number of missiles to destroy or even seriously damage such facilities, Tehran could conduct limited attacks to pressure the Arab Gulf states to reduce their support for Iraq or ties to the US. [REDACTED]

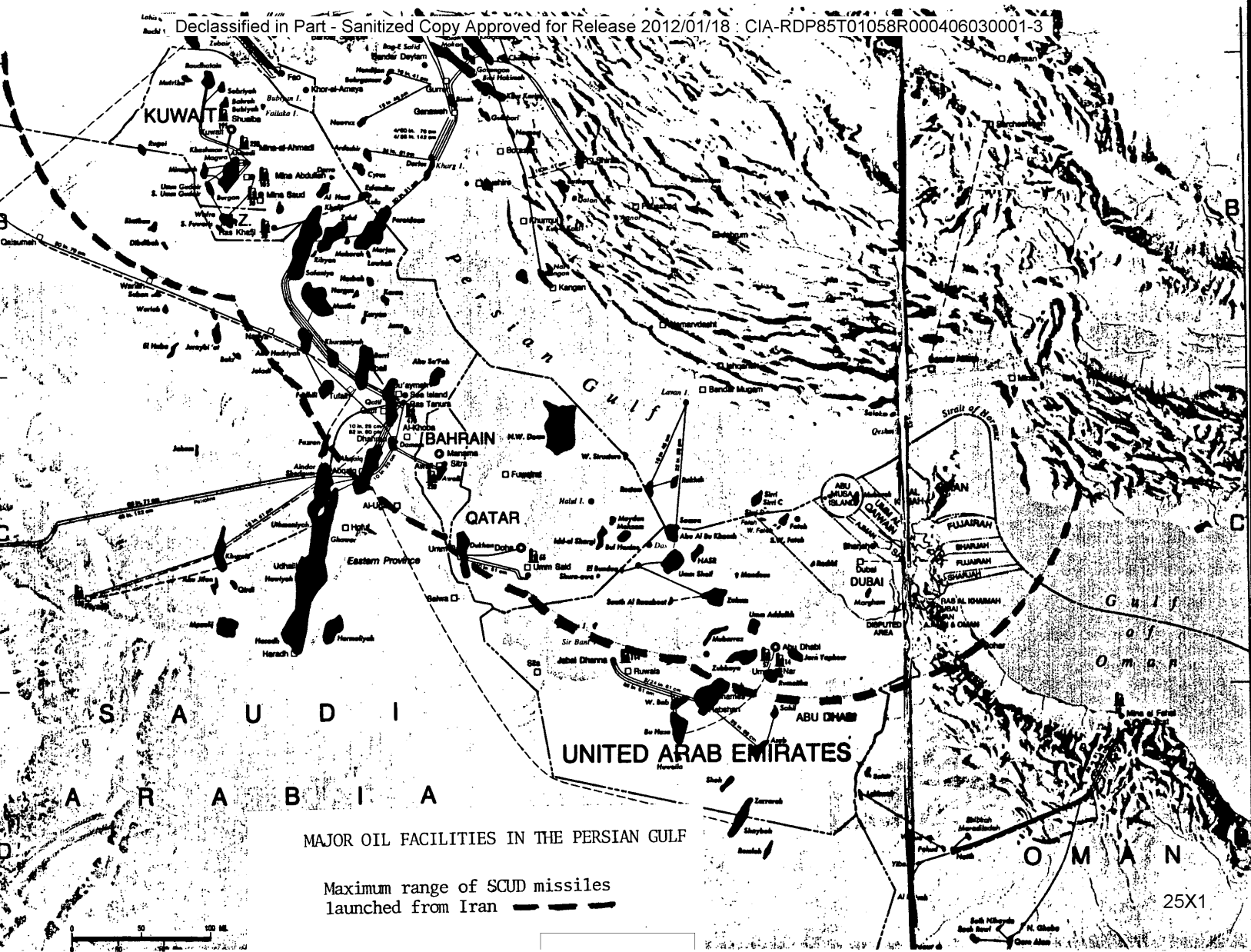
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Tehran wishes to avoid any military confrontation with the US and is unlikely to strike any US facilities deliberately. Nonetheless, rockets launched against targets in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait could harm US personnel in these countries. If the US should launch an air or naval attack on Iran, Tehran probably would launch surface-to-surface missiles against US facilities in retaliation. Primary targets would probably include US Embassy compounds or housing blocks, construction projects, and the headquarters facilities of the Commander Middle East Force in Manama, Bahrain. [REDACTED]

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